

My name is James Henderson, and I am a Graduate Student in the Department of Statistics at the University of Michigan. Last summer, I served as Graduate Student Research Assistant (GSRA) in The Center for Computational and Mathematical Biology. I'm a Michigan native. I grew up in the Kalamazoo area, and I'm an alumni of Michigan State University. I'm proud to be both a student and an employee at the University of Michigan.

My name is Elaine Lande and I'm a Graduate Student Research Assistant in the School of Education at the University of Michigan. I've served as a GSRA in my department for over three years. I'm also a Michigan native. I grew up in Dearborn; I attended Henry Ford Community College and Madonna University. I completed my Masters Degree at Wayne State University in Math. I moved to Ann Arbor to pursue my PhD and intend to stay in Michigan for my career. I'm proud to be both a student and an employee at the University of Michigan.

We are testifying today on our behalf and on behalf of the majority of research assistants—all UM employees—who, 306 days ago, filed for an election to form a union. More than 1,400 of us have signed cards indicating that we want to form a union – we are over half of all GSRAs employed by the university.

Yet we, the majority, have been prevented from having an election by the continued efforts of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy and Attorney General Bill Schuette. Their petitions to the Michigan Employment Relations Commission, the Court of Appeals, the State Supreme Court and the state circuit court were intended to take away our right to vote. They have *all* been rejected as lacking standing. Now, instead of letting MERC proceed with making the determinations it is charged to make, some in the state legislature wish to take away our voting rights.

It is hard for us to understand why anyone – faculty members, university administrators or even our elected representatives--would question that GSRAs are employees with the right to vote for a union. We pay federal and state income taxes. Unlike students on fellowship, we receive a W-2 form from the university. In addition, we signed an oath required of all public employees in the state of Michigan. Merely enrolling as a student does not necessitate that we swear such an oath. Without our work and that of more than 2,000 of our colleagues, the University would not be able to conduct the world-class research it prides itself on producing.

We favor forming a union. A few of our colleagues very vocally disagree with us, but the way to settle the question is through a fair election administered by MERC – not through legislation taking away our right to vote. GSRAs forming a union would help us work together to protect our rights and enable the university to bargain with us fairly. Because it would be a positive force run by GSRAs for GSRAs, it would only improve the standing of the University of Michigan. Unemployment is still high in this state, and we are losing thousands of talented residents annually in a brain drain. Our government should be working to create jobs and attract more talented workers, not eliminate the rights of workers who are already here.

Please vote against this bill and focus on improving the economy for all Michigan citizens. We would be happy to speak with you individually about our employment situations before you decide how to vote on this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.